

THE LIFETIME READING PLAN

Adapted from the book by Clifton Fadiman.

● KARL MARX (1818-1883) and FRIEDRICH ENGELS (1820-1895): "The Communist Manifesto."

YOUR BOOK

IT has been said that no thinker in the 19th century has had so direct, deliberate, and powerful an influence on mankind as Karl Marx.

For that reason alone it is worth reading "The Manifesto of the Communist Party," for which his co-worker, Engels, is partly responsible.

Up to 1848 Marx, a German-Jewish middle-class intellectual, spent most of his years as a journalist in Cologne, Paris, and Brussels. Forced to leave Prussian territory, he emigrated to England. The last 34 years of his life were spent there, mainly in the British Museum. Marx's life was uneventful: it became more significant after his death.

His main work is "Capital," but there is no point in reading it unless you are a very earnest student. It is very difficult to read—a great deal of it is out of date, and it was written in a heavy, German style. It would be best to read a summary of its ideas.

"The Communist Manifesto," however, is quite readable. It is not a great work of literature, it is propaganda—but propaganda on the grand scale.

In clear terms it presents the main ideas of pure Communism. For instance, it states that the history of civilisation is a history of a struggle between the classes; that there must be a total overturning of society and not merely a political revolution.

"The Manifesto" begins with one of the most famous sentences ever written: "A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism." It ends with three sentences no less famous: "The proletarians (factory workers) have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working-men of all countries, unite."

The history of both the Western and Communist worlds has already demonstrated that Marx's concluding sentences are not true, but the influence of "The Manifesto" still remains one of the realities of our time.

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● **FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE (1844-1900): "Thus Spoke Zarathustra." Selected Works.**

THIS was the man who began the cult of the Superman. The Nazis exploited Nietzsche's doctrines—the celebration of war, ruthlessness, and the idea of an elite class, but Nietzsche would have despised Hitler. He was not anti-Semitic and he condemned German nationalism.

He was a total revolutionary, even more perhaps than Marx. He thought that Christianity was "slave-morality." He rejected the virtues of sympathy and tolerance in favor of "the will to power."

He stressed the positive power of heroic suffering and tragic experience. No one can deny his extraordinary gift for language and his wonderful poetical images, but his writing was uncontrolled and he must be read with a critical mind.

On the other hand, he helped to point out to his century, and ours, many of our hypocrisies and our cowardice.

● **NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI (1469-1527): "The Prince."**

MACHIAVELLI was a practical politician.

Under the Florentine Republic he held office for 14 years, serving as a diplomat and army organiser.

In "The Prince" he put down his observations of the Italian city States and the emerging nations of the Western Europe of his time, particularly France.

Machiavelli's reputation—that of a godless and cynical defender of force and fraud in politics—was the result of misunderstanding. All he did was to tell the truth about power as he saw it in operation, and if the truth is not pretty he can hardly be blamed for that.

Machiavelli was no hater of mankind, neither was he devilish nor neurotic. What he really wanted was a united Italy, free of Spanish and French domination.

"The Prince" is a manual. It tells the ambitious leader how he must gain, maintain, and centralise power. Because the politics of European nationalism have been, in part, guided by this icy, terrifyingly intelligent book of instruction, it is well worth reading.

NEXT WEEK: Donne, Milton, Wordsworth.